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**COLLEGE THEOLOGY SOCIETY ENDORSES STUDY THAT DISPUTES
INFALLIBILITY OF CHURCH TEACHING ON ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

DAYTON, Ohio — Theologians across the country are questioning the "infallible" status of the Roman Catholic Church teaching that women cannot be ordained as priests.

Two major theology societies now challenge claims by the Roman Catholic Church that not ordaining women is an infallible church teaching, a Vatican proclamation that renders the teaching essential to Catholic faith and unchangeable.

In November the board of directors of the College Theology Society, a national organization of college and university theology and religious studies professors, endorsed the conclusions of a yearlong study, "Tradition and the Ordination of Women: A Question of Criteria," done for the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA).

Both groups say there are serious doubts about the infallibility of the church teaching that women cannot serve as priests. The CTSA scholars who conducted the study based their conclusions on a comprehensive review of Scripture and the history of the Catholic tradition, which they claim failed to offer them definitive evidence of the infallibility of that teaching, said Terry Tilley, president of the College Theology Society and chair of the religious studies department at the University of Dayton.

The CTSA study challenges a 1995 statement, "Responsum ad dubium," written by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The statement claimed the teaching to be infallible, although it was not specifically designated infallible by Pope John Paul II. According to Tilley, the Vatican statement was issued in response to a question it received from a bishop. The bishop's question was "Is the teaching that women cannot be ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church to be held as a definitive and thus 'infallible' teaching?" In "Responsum ad dubium," the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said yes.

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Members of both societies are calling for continued prayer and reflection regarding the non-ordination of women to the priesthood.

Tilley said the board of the College Theology Society agrees with the CTSA stance that this issue cannot be seen as finally closed.

"I'm pleased that theologians have continued to publish on the issue," Tilley said. "The assertion that the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made was that it was infallibly taught. But there are questions about the status of this teaching, whether it is reformable or not."

Despite some reports, Tilley says, the CTSA did not dissent from the teaching of the church limiting priestly ordination to men. "They merely presented an argument and evidence that this teaching is not clearly an exercise of the infallible teaching office of the church," he said.

Tilley said the CTSA study has met with some challenges. "Some individuals have misinterpreted the intent and action of the CTSA," he says. "Even fine contributions to the discussion sometimes confuse two issues. One is the question of the status of the teaching — is it infallible? The other is the issue of the ordination of women — should the church ordain women to the priesthood? The CTSA report addressed only the issue of infallibility."

Sister Mary Ann Donovan, S.C., president of CTSA and associate professor of patristics at the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, expressed gratitude for the College Theology Society board's action. Donovan said, "It is my hope that members of both societies will continue their theological reflections and publications on the issues raised in a spirit of cooperation and ecclesial communion."